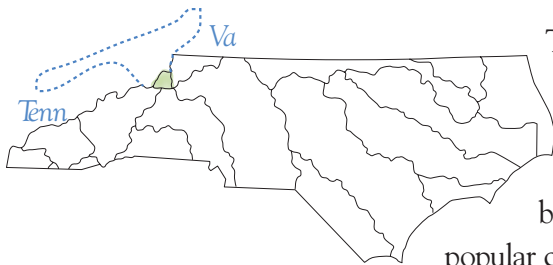


# WATAUGA RIVER BASIN

Flowing peaks, snowskiing, flyfishing, clear mountain streams and year-round scenery are the hallmarks of the Watauga River Basin. The North Carolina portion of the Watauga River Basin includes the headwaters and tributaries of the Elk and Watauga rivers. These two rivers flow northwest into Tennessee, and their waters eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River.



The Watauga River Basin is trout country. Anglers find wild populations of native brook trout alongside hatchery-raised rainbow, brown and brook trout in the streams of the upper basin. Rock bass and smallmouth bass are other popular catches. Thousands of tourists also flock to this

region to ski, hike and golf. Breathtaking vistas are another offering that visitors discover in abundance. The Watauga River Gorge, where the river drops sharply as it enters Tennessee, is one of the most beautiful stretches in the basin. Parts of the basin are traversed by the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway and contained within the Pisgah National Forest.

The basin includes parts of Watauga and Avery counties and only six incorporated towns, including Banner Elk, Beech Mountain and a portion of Boone. Although the year-round population of this basin is low, the area hosts vast numbers of seasonal visitors. Overall water quality is excellent—most of the streams flow undisturbed through the forested mountains of the Blue Ridge.

The second smallest river basin in the state, the Watauga River Basin makes up in rugged beauty for what it lacks in size. The Watauga River

BILL LEA



## profile:

Total miles of streams and rivers: 270

Municipalities within basin: 6

Counties within basin: 2

Size: 205 square miles

Population: 23,676 (2000 U.S. Census)



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Trout fishing on the Watauga (above); fall visits the Pisgah National Forest (left); Carolina northern flying squirrel (below)

KEN TAYLOR, WILDLIFE IMAGES

